

Jewish Miracles and Magic

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Hello everyone, today I am going to be talking about Jewish miracles in the Second Temple Period. Jews thought of miracles as “signs’ and wonders” performed by male and female miracle workers. The stories of these miracles were mostly reported by the admirers of these miracle workers. In this period, Jews asked four specific questions to help them understand and analyze the miracles that were witnessed.

1. Do miracle workers have their own capabilities or do the abilities come from an external source?
2. Who receives credit for the miracles?
3. Who profits from the miracle?
4. How could miracles be used for good and evil?

In answering these questions, Bohak uses miracle workers from the Bible, Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Jesus, and a few others. Based on the first question, Bohak highlights how Moses performed miracles at the command of God. He states how Elijah and Elisha were claimed to have superhuman power and were also given power from God, however many believed that most of the miracles were not “instigated by God” (Bohak, 680). With Jesus’ miracles, people deeply questioned where he received his power, most Jews consider the Holy Spirit but others thought it was from demonic power.

Moses, based on the second question, received credit for his miracles, but God received credit as well. Elijah and Elisha were only given credit for their beneficial miracles, however, their harsh miracles were recalled by Ben Sira in the second century (Bohak, 681). Although David began using his psalms to perform exorcisms, King Solomon was given the credit for it. Jesus also received credit for his miracles and were compared to Moses, David, Solomon, and Elijah, who were all considered charismatic prophets.

The third question shows us that the Israelites that Moses saved from bondage benefitted from his miracles. Elijah’s and Elisha’s miracle benefitted both the individuals and

themselves because the more miracles they did, the more it enhanced their miracle status. Jesus' miracles also benefited him and the people that he saved.

Given the fourth question, Moses used his miracle powers for good and evil, punishing the Egyptians but delivering the Israelites. Elijah and Elisha used their miracle powers to heal people, resurrect people, feed people, but they also participated in evil miracles, like destroying armies that were against them. Jesus used his miracle powers for the good of the people, even though he performed no evil miracles, he was still betrayed and crucified by the Romans and some Jews because he was not trusted.

All in all, asking these questions allowed the Jewish people to understand miracles on a deeper level. Later in the Middle Ages, Jew began to doubt the miracles that were documented. Even though miracles aren't as common as they used to be in the Second Temple period, there are multiple documents displaying the miracles that did occur.

- Bohak, Gideon and Geza Vermes. "Jewish Miracle Workers and Magic in the Second Temple Period" In *Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 2nd Edition. edited by Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler. Pages 680-682. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.